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ABSTRACT

This paper explicates methods to motivate African American students to exhibit attitudes and behaviors that are conducive to high academic achievement. In particular, it argues that educational models must acknowledge and correct students' sense of academic futility. Academic futility measures student perceptions of the extent to which factors in the academic environment inhibit success in school. Student academic futility is the student's feeling that the academic "deck of life" is stacked against them and that there is relatively little they can do to overcome this. The paper describes using popular culture in several interventions as an academic futility intervention tool, particularly materials that use cartoons and illustrations to help students overcome academic futility. Another section describes developing a school climate to impact students' sense of futility in 8 years at the Piney Woods Country Life School, a rural Mississippi private school serving African American students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. This section explains the academic grounding of academic futility intervention approaches and their implementation at Piney Woods, including needs assessment, curriculum development, staff development, student development, physical environment, administration, and resource development. Appendixes contain questions for the academic futility scale, an example of an intervention poem, and research findings. (Contains 37 references.) (JB)

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Occasional Paper #7

A Systemic Approach to Creating an Effective Academic Environment for African-American Students: Lessons from a Private School

by
Charles H. Beady, Jr.
with
Maxine O. Beady

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A SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO CREATING AN EFFECTIVE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS: LESSONS FROM A PRIVATE SCHOOL

A Presentation

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FOR

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Developing Popular Culture Models to Impact Student Sense of Futility

The primary goal of this paper is to provide evidence to educators that supports the proposition that in order to motivate students to exhibit attitudes and behaviors conducive to high academic achievement, education models must incorporate strategies to: a) access the potential role of academic futility in relation to the problem, and b) alleviate or ameliorate the effect of academic futility on student attitudes and behaviors. In short, it is suggested that education models incorporate provisions to rule out or accommodate academic futility as a possible cause of the academi problems that students exhibit.

What is Academic Futility?

The concept of academic futility was introduced by Brookover, Gigliotti, Henderson and Schneider (1973) and revised by Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer and Wisenbaker (1979). The academic futility scale combined "me as student"-oriented questions, "other student"-oriented questions, and teacher-student interaction questions (see Appendix A for questions comprising the scale) to measure student perceptions of the extent to which factors in the academic environment inhibit success in school. Student academic futility is the feeling, on the part of some students, that the academic "deck of life" is stacked against them and that there is relatively little they can do to overcome this situation.

Futility Intervention: Some Examples

Academic futility is not thought to be innate and immutable. Much empirical evidence suggests that the social psychological climates of social subsystems to which students belong help mediate the academic futility level that students exhibit. This notion makes available at least two options to educators concerned with helping students overcome their feelings of academic futility. This being the case, it makes sense that strategies can be developed to: a) build a climate in a given social subsystem (e.g., a school) that facilitates motivation and low futility, and b) provide students with the necessary information and skills for overcoming feelings of academic futility.

Popular Culture As An Intervention Tool

While Bandura (1969) indicates that attention is a necessary precondition for learning, Appelbaum, Anatol, Hays, Owen, Porter and Mandel (1973) maintain that a number of variables may come into play in an attempt to attract and maintain the attention of the potential listener, including credibility, content, fear appeals, and the mind-set of the potential listener. Pasture (1981) is a long-time advocate and user of popular culture as an attention-getting counseling tool.

One of the most visible aspects of the popular culture of young people is illustration and/or cartoons. Several studies suggest that illustrations can be used to enhance learning (Weiner, 1979; Silverbank, 1981; Sewell and Moore, 1980). Such notions led to my developing a number of publications and productions that utilize cartoons and illustrations to help students overcome academic futility. Most of these materials have been field-tested and have proven to be effective in attracting and maintaining the attention of a variety of audiences, including preschoolers, elementary, junior high, and high school students; teachers and other professionals; and parents. These materials include: a) cartoon-illustrated slide-audio presentations with such titles as "Something My Mother Told Me" (Beady, 1978a), "A Very Important Person" (Beady, 1978b), "Confessions of a Former Cool Dude" (Beady, 1980), and b) cartoon-illustrated books and posters with such titles as *Rhymes for Self-Concept* (Beady, 1981a), *Education Rap* (Beady, 1981b), *Motivating Low Achieving Students: A Handbook for Teachers* (Beady, 1982a), *Life, How to Play the Game and Win: A Book of Rules for Teenagers* (Beady & Farrell, 1982b), *Making Babies* (Beady & Farrell, 1982c), and *Crossing Over: Choices for Young Women* (Farrell & Beady, 1982).

The materials listed above have received excellent evaluations from a number of audiences. For instance, 77 percent of a sample group of Baltimore, Maryland high school students (N=114) participating in a jobs training program reported that viewing "Confessions of a Former Cool Dude" (Beady, 1980) made them want to be better students. Similarly, 76 percent indicated that watching this cartoon-illustrated slide-audio presentation made them feel as if they could become better students. Additionally,

teachers often report surprise at not only the ability of the presentation to capture and maintain the attention of their students but also at the fact that their students talk about the presentation for days after having seen it.

The Prostitution Diversion Project

One of the most gratifying experiences involving the use of illustrated materials to overcome academic futility came from Milwaukee (WI) County's "Crossover" program which was designed to help divert teenage females involved in prostitution from further prostitution contacts. In the beginning of the book that was developed for the program (Farrell & Beady, 1982) is an illustrated anti-futility poem entitled "A Very Important Person" (See Appendix B). The young girls in the prostitution diversion project voted to open and close their group counseling sessions by reciting the poem. The program director indicated that it did what it was designed to do. It made the girls feel better about their chances of making it in life.

Crisis in Paradise

In late 1980, I was invited by the Department of Education of the U.S. Virgin Islands to conduct a one-week motivation workshop for counselors and some 100 youngsters who were identified as having severe discipline problems and on the verge of being permanently expelled from school. They ranged from ages 11 to 19. They had thwarted all efforts of teachers and administrators to resolve their problem behavior.

The workshop focused almost exclusively on student sense of academic futility and utilized many of the materials listed earlier in this paper to help counsel and motivate the students. The first day of the workshop was for counselors. The second day was the first day for student participation. About half of the students expected were present. On the third day student participation increased. On the fourth day there were bus scheduling problems, yet more students showed than on the previous two days. Many assumed responsibility for arranging their own transportation (including walking extended distances).

In short, their eager participation contradicted the conveyed expectations that these youngsters had little or no interest or concern about taking advantage of the educational opportunity being offered to them. Furthermore, the quality of their participation shocked and surprised most of the adults associated with the workshop.

Interestingly, but not surprisingly, the students indicated that most of their negative behaviors were a reflection of their perception that the school system did not care about them.

The experience with those students who were labeled by many as generally inarticulate, of less-than-average intelligence, and incorrigible, reinforced the conviction that their behaviors and attitudes were rational and predictable responses to the futility that they developed through long-term interaction with an educational system that was not prepared to deal with the consequences of that futility. The experience further showed that by focusing the workshop on students' academic futility, we had tapped an area that the students themselves felt contributed to their negative behavior.

Certainly academic futility is not the only problem impacting students in our nation's schools. Empirical evidence, however, suggests that it is widespread and highly related to academic achievement. The examples of futility intervention efforts presented here indicate that something can be done about it.

Research shows clearly that there is a relationship between futility or locus of control and student outcomes. The suggestion being offered here is that strategies aimed at decreasing the feeling of academic futility can help young people who have been low achievers to "realize" or "actualize" the belief that for them, too, academic excellence is a real, attainable goal. Once they begin to believe that they are capable, they will begin to act like it!

Developing School Climate to Impact Student Sense of Futility

The school climate model addressed here is based on eight years of practical application of educational strategies that have proven to be effective in improving

achievement levels of those students at The Piney Woods Country Life School who come primarily from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

In 1984, I was asked to come to The Piney Woods Country Life School to head up the academic program. Prior to coming to Piney Woods, I was senior research scientist at the Institute for Urban Research at Morgan State University and a research affiliate at The Johns Hopkins University. My primary research area focused on effective schools and effective schooling for African-American youths. The education that I received at the master's and doctoral levels that undergirds my thinking and philosophy regarding effective schools and effective schooling centered on Thomas S. Gunnings' teachings (1972).

I saw the invitation to come to Piney Woods as an irresistible opportunity to put into practice methods that I had learned in the study of systemic intervention along with the findings of the research I had pursued over the years, particularly that conducted with Wilbur B. Brookover.

As a researcher, I realized that a great deal of research would never be put to practical use. Thousands of dissertations and research articles are presently sitting on library shelves and, sadly, will never reach the practitioners who have the responsibility for teaching the children. Rarely does the researcher have the opportunity to actually put his own research to practical use. I am most grateful for my experience at Piney Woods, for not only has it substantiated my research, but it has also helped produce better-prepared graduates who have gone on, and continue to go on, to successfully pursue college degrees; and it has also helped to establish an educational model that dares to defy the notion that poor students and students who exhibit a high sense of futility cannot be academically successful.

One of the major findings of my own research suggests that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds tend to achieve at lower levels because of their belief that the academic deck of life is stacked against them and no matter what, it will continue to be this way. This notion is referred to as **student sense of academic futility** (Brookover et al., 1979) and defined earlier in this paper.

The notion of academic futility that such students exhibit was the guiding precept that was brought to bear at Piney Woods to establish a climate that says to our students that the academic deck of life is not stacked against you; **you can learn; we will see to it that you do**.

Achievement continues to be on the upswing at Piney Woods. We attribute this increase to a model that we have developed that says if you reduce or eliminate academic sense of futility, you will increase achievement, but the strategies for reducing or eliminating futility must be **radical**.

When my wife and I came, as a team, to Piney Woods in August 1984, an immediate goal of the Board of Trustees was to improve the academic performance of the students attending the school. One year later, an analysis of achievement data showed 50 percent more students on the honor roll over the previous year and a 3.32 point average increase on the nationally standardized American College Test (ACT).

After a number of years of implementing programs and practices at Piney Woods School, positive results are apparent. Many innovations were introduced based on my previous training and research experience. This includes work conducted with two of America's foremost educational researchers—Wilbur B. Brookover of Michigan State University and Robert Slavin of The Johns Hopkins University, as well as with the noted black counseling theorist, Thomas S. Gunnings of Michigan State University.

The thread that holds all of what we do together, however, is the "Effective Schools" philosophy. The essence of that philosophy, as the late Ron Edmonds (Edmonds and Brookover are often referred to as the fathers of the Effective Schools Movement) put, is as follows:

a) We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us;

b) We already know more than we need to do that; and

c) Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far (Edmonds, 1979).

The major focus of what we do at The Piney Woods Country Life School centers around the concept of **student sense of academic futility**. Again, students who report high academic futility are thought to feel that the academic deck of life is stacked against them and there is relatively little they can do to overcome this situation.

High academic futility results from a schedule of negative interactions in the school sociopsychological environment which in turn acts upon the student's perceptions to reinforce the notion that no matter how hard (s)he works, factors in the environment will inhibit academic success. Once an individual internalizesthis notion, futility becomes its own self-fulfilling prophecy.

Several studies support the notion that student sense of futility is related to academic achievement. Coleman and his colleagues (1966), for instance, concluded from their analyses that one key toward academic success for minorities who have found the environment unresponsive is to somehow change the perception that hard work will not pay. They wrote:

> Having experienced an unresponsive environment, the virtues of hard work, of diligent and extended effort toward achievement appear to such a child unlikely to be rewarding. As a consequence, he is likely to merely "adjust" to his environments, finding satisfaction in passive pursuits (p. 321).

Brookover et al. (1979) also found that black youngsters are more likely to express a high sense of futility or lack of control over their environment than white youngsters. One conclusion of that study was that school climates appropriately designed to facilitate learning could reduce the feelings of futility that characterized many of the black students.

Research by Habteyes and Beady (1991) indicates that student factors other than race are also associated with academic futility. The Habteyes and Beady study shows, for instance, that: a) white male elementary school students are significantly more likely to report high academic futility than white female elementary school students; b) younger black, and white, age-appropriate students (e.g., nine-year-old fourth-graders) are more likely to report high academic futility than older black and white age-appropriate students (e.g., eleven-year-old sixth-graders), and c) black and white elementary school students in lower grades report higher academic futility than their counterparts in higher grades.

In a study of the effects of alternative grading structures on student achievement, Beady and Slavin (1980) found that black students who were graded on the basis of improvement showed greater gains in achievement than black students graded on the traditional basis of relative standing. One explanation for this finding centered on the possibility that the experimental treatment decreased the sense of futility felt by African-American students, thus motivating them to achieve at a higher level.

Each of these studies mentioned above acknowledges an association between academic futility (or sense of control) and academic achievement. However, there is some disagreement over the role of factors such as school climate in determining student outcomes such as academic achievement. The Coleman et al. study (1966), for instance, suggests that school climate has no effect on student achievement over and above the effects of race and socioeconomic status (SES). On the other hand, Brookover et al. (1973, 1979) offer findings which show that school climate **does**, in fact, account for variance in school achievement over and above the effects of race and socioeconomic status.

Lending to the argument that school climate affects student outcomes is a substantial body of research which has tested the hypothesis that teacher expectations are related to student achievement outcomes (Brophy & Good, 1970; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Reviews in this area have concluded that evidence generally supports the teacher expectation hypothesis (Brophy & Good, 1974; Rosenthal, 1976). In addition, specific factors such as student-teacher communication patterns (Jeter, 1975; Gay, 1975) and teacher race (Beady & Hansell, 1981) also have been shown to be related to expectation effects. Factors such as those just listed are thought to help comprise school climate (Brookover et al.,1979).

The findings of the school climate studies are substantiated by a body of literature in the field of counseling that focuses on the notion that social systems may cause behaviors that lead to academic failure (Beady, 1978a; Banks & Martens, 1973; Gunnings & Simpkins, 1972; Stubbins, 1970).

As urban school systems continue to sag under the weight of higher dropout rates, lower achievement scores, and the lion's share of inappropriate behavior, America

continues to ask what is wrong with the students? This posture automatically places the onus of the problem on the students. It blames the victim.

The systemic approach to counseling places the change agent in the position of asking what is wrong with the system that is causing the symptoms we see. Systemic philosophy maintains that the cause of problems is often external to the individual residing within the climates of the social systems that prevail over the members of those systems.

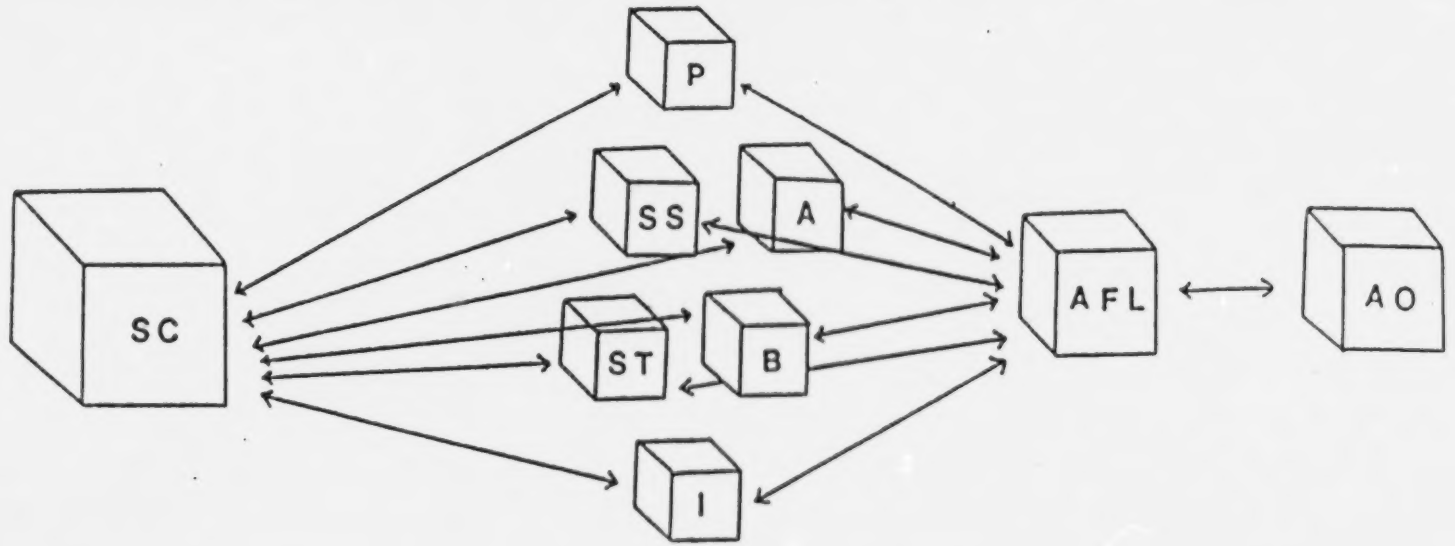
How a problem is defined, according to Caplan and Nelson (1973) will determine remediation strategies or whether attempts at remediation will be made. In short, if the location of the problem is incorrectly traced, the solution to the problem will be evasive.

Since 1984, most of the programs and strategies utilized at Piney Woods have drawn upon systemic philosophy and the effective schools research to facilitate an academic climate and to impact sense of futility in such a way as to foster high achievement among black students who come primarily from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

The model presented here (Figure 1) grows out of research which has clearly demonstrated strong and significant associations between student sense of academic futility and academic achievement (Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfield, & York, 1966; Brookover et al., 1973, 1978, 1979). This model which we feel is being successfully implemented at The Piney Woods Country Life School traces the origins of academic futility, at least in part, to the academic climates of the schools that students attend. Moving from left to right, the model posits that interaction with school environment (climate) impacts upon students' personal characteristics including perceptions, attitudes, behavior, social skills and so forth. For instance, Brookover et al. (19[illegible]) have shown that the school a youngster attends may have a significant impact upon that youngster's feelings regarding whether or not (s)he is capable of higher levels of academic achievement. This relationship is represented in the model by the path: SC—A—AFL—AO (SC = School Climate, A=Attitudes, AFL = Academic Futility level, AO = Achievement Outcomes). The model allows for reverse flow mediation, which means that the direction of impact can change. Academic outcomes can in turn influence other attitudes, and so forth (e.g., SC—A—AFL—AO) (Beady, 1984).

Figure 1

CAUSAL MODEL OF MEDIATING VARIABLES WITH HYPOTHESIZED RELATIONS TO STUDENT ACADEMIC FUTILITY AND ACHIEVEMENT OUTCOMES



SC: School Climate

AFL: Academic Futility Level

AO: Achievement Outcomes

P: Perceptions
A: Attitudes
B: Behaviors
I: Information base
ST: Support Structures
SS: Social Skills

High Academic Futility, the model suggests, results from a schedule of negative interactions in the school sociopsychological environment which in turn acts upon the student's personal characteristics to reinforce the notion that no matter how hard (s)he works, factors in the environment will inhibit academic success. Once an individual internalizes this notion, futility becomes its own self-fulfilling prophecy.

Early in my career I had the opportunity to work with two giants in the field of educational research. I worked as a graduate assistant for Wilbur Brookover of Michigan State University and later, as a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for Social Organization of Schools at The Johns Hopkins University, I worked on several projects with Robert Slavin. Results from the research that I conducted with Brookover and Slavin were central to establishing the programs and methods that we eventually implemented at The Piney Woods Country Life School. Listed in Appendix C are some of the salient findings that have played a major part in the programs and methods we have implemented (Brookover et al., 1979, Beady et al., 1981).

Preparing for Implementation

My first few weeks at Piney Woods, aside from putting out a number of "fires," were primarily observational. Research had already supported the notion that students who are poor and from single-parent homes are not automatically doomed to academic and social failure. While statistics have shown that the individual who is black, poor, and from a weak family structure is more likely to achieve at lower levels, many individuals have disproved this notion. **All children can learn** is the major tenent that guides the successful programs and methods currently being implemented at The Piney Woods Country Life School.

The programs and methods put in place are aimed at ameliorating behaviors and characteristics that we observed to be common among The Piney Woods Country Life School students who come primarily from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Such behaviors and characteristics include the following:

- low academic achievement (poor reading, math and grammar skills)
- high sense of futility

- socio-emotional problems
- inappropriate social behaviors
- high expulsion and drop-out rates
- low self-esteem
- little demonstration of goal setting and future planning
- misplaced value structure
- limited understanding of the world around them
- lack of motivation for academic achievement
- poor study skills and habits

Needs Assessment

Prior to implementing new programs and strategies, we reviewed the school climate as it relates to the following:

- school mission and philosophy
- curriculum and programs
- student achievement levels (teacher-made and standardized test scores)
- staff and faculty production
- student and staff perceptions, attitudes and involvement
- school policies, procedures, and practices
- organizational patterns
- alumni involvement
- strengths and weaknesses of administrators
- plant and facilities
- parent and community involvement
- board characteristics
- discipline codes and practices
- dress codes
- resources (human and financial)

After assessing the entire school program, we found the following:

- overall achievement levels were below average

- staff expectations for student learning were low
- students had a high sense of academic futility (the belief that the academic deck of life was stacked against them)
- student disciplinary problems were extremely high
- the aesthetic environment and physical plant left many things to be desired
- the curriculum needed improvements
- goals and objectives were not clearly defined to staff
- policies, procedures and practices were not clearly articulated
- organizational structure was inadequate
- the development effort needed improvement
- staff skills needed upgrading

Implementing the Programs and Methods

There are six areas of focus we felt were strategic to increasing achievement among Piney Woods students who come primarily from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Some of the strategies that have proven to be effective toward increasing student achievement at Piney Woods are indicated under each of the following areas:

- Curriculum Development
- Staff Development
- Student Development
- Physical Environment
- Administration
- Resource Development (human and financial)

Curriculum Development

1. Classes are offered in two-hour blocks to provide a longer segment of instructional time and to accommodate a student work program.

2. Classes are monitored by sex, which decreases classroom distractions.

3. Grades are monitored on a weekly basis to provide immediate feedback on student achievement.

4. No student is allowed to play sports or participate in non-education oriented extracurricular activities if he or she falls below a "C" average in any class during a given week. This sets a tone that says academics are more important than sports.

5. A non-graded elementary program has been instituted to provide a core of better-prepared, upper level students.

6. All students are required to attend a weekly lab to reinforce any academic objectives not mastered during regular class periods.

7. All secondary students are required to attend the reading resource laboratory to enhance reading and writing skills on a regular basis, irrespective of reading level.

8. Reading and writing across the curriculum is a requirement.

9. Grading is based on mastery of objectives to accommodate learning styles and rates and assess comprehension.

10. Students who receive a grade below "C" average for a given nine-week period are given an "I" (incomplete) rather than a failing grade and are allowed the following nine weeks to make up the "I." This also takes into account differences in student learning rates.

11. Drama is utilized in a variety of student experiences in lower and upper school classrooms and in extracurricular activities and is important to self-expression.

12. Participation in music-related activities in areas such as choir, band and classroom lessons has been instrumental in motivating and retaining students who may have otherwise been lost.

13. A Writing Across the Curriculum program has been implemented in conjunction with the BreadLoaf School of English (Middlebury, Vermont) to help continue to improve students' and teachers' writing skills.

14. Pre- and post-achievement tests are given at the beginning and end of every school year. This facilitates an effective grouping process and also helps teachers organize lessons.

15. The use of computer lab reinforces all aspects of the school curriculum.

16. Black history is a regular part of the school curriculum. In addition to a black history course, all teachers are required to incorporate black history into their

respective content areas. Research demonstrates the importance of the study of one's history as it relates to increased academic achievement.

17. A great deal of emphasis is placed on encouraging all students to pursue a post secondary education. This is done through frequent visitations to college campuses, college fairs, exposure to fraternity and sorority life, group sessions with college students and so forth. All Piney Woods teachers are referred to as professors to also help foster this notion.

18. Both low-achieving and high-achieving students attend developmental education classes for the purpose of remediation for low achievers and academic challenge for high achievers. The organization of this class removes any stigma of "special education" traditionally attached to low achievers who attend classes made up only of low achievers.

19. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are provided for low achievers usually soon after the school year begins. IEPs are planned by the curriculum development committee.

20. The curriculum and development and student regulations committees were set up to provide direction for curriculum improvements and to enforce student regulations. The committees meet on a regular basis and have broad-based representation to include the principal, school counselors, parents, teachers, dorm parents, disciplinarians, and other administrators. This provides for better communication among staff regarding student needs, both educationally and socially.

21. A strong academic department chair system was put into place, Under this system, the chairs have strong administrative control over department programs and efforts, and are held responsible for departmental outcomes.

Staff Development

1. Staff recognition is implemented on a consistent basis. Banquets are held twice a year where staff receive awards. An annual Teacher Appreciation Week is held. Secretaries Week is recognized. Presidential awards are given annually. Bonuses and letters of recognition and simple pats on the back are provided consistently.

2. Workshops are held at the school and staff are sent to seminars to improve skills. Financial assistance is provided to staff to pursue advanced training and advanced degrees.

3. All administrators adhere to an open-door policy to provide for better lines of communication.

4. Faculty and staff are required to stay current in their fields by being abreast of research and belonging to professional organizations and attending conferences.

5. All staff who work directly with students and adolescents attend a workshop on adolescent development.

6. Staff are provided workshops on the use of listening skills when interacting with students. This helps build rapport and helps students feel a sense of being cared for.

Student Development

1. Counseling is a must and is provided by two full-time counselors who coordinate all structured counseling efforts. All students are screened initially for counseling needs and referred immediately for counseling if needed.

   - Peer counselors are well-trained and utilized.
   - A full-time minister provides spiritual counseling.
   - Group and one-on-one counseling is provided.
   - Students needing more serious counseling are referred outside of the school.

2. Extracurricular activities are mandatory for all students to develop skills and talents to keep them out of trouble.

3. Discipline is strict and consistent to maintain an orderly school climate. Research shows that an orderly climate is more conducive to high levels of achievement.

4. Extra care is taken to expose students to people, places, and things in the world around them, through both direct and vicarious experiences (e.g., student visits to Russia, foods from different cultures prepared in home economics classes, lectures and so forth.

5. School rules such as disciplinary practices and dress codes are strictly adhered to. Here again, this is extremely important to building a climate that says education comes first.

6. Students are recognized on a regular and consistent basis to serve as a reinforcement for obtaining desirable behaviors (e.g., awards programs, public announcements, cafeteria and chapel announcements, etc.).

7. Students are required to attend Sunday services and Bible studies for the purpose of building moral and spiritual character.

8. Projects and practices are in place to foster and maintain school pride (e.g., school song, weekly lectures on pride) and the school environment is kept neat and clean by students and staff.

9. Activities are in place to encourage the development of leadership skills (e.g., all seniors are required to give a public speech before graduating, students take a primary role in school programs, the student congress is active, and students conduct workshops).

10. All students are required to work a minimum of fifteen hours per week in a variety of jobs to instill a good work ethic and provide job skills.

11. Students are regularly provided with lectures and workshops aimed at test-taking skills, study skills, career development, future planning, etiquette, sex education, drug education, values clarification, educational motivation, developing leadership skills, etc.

12. Students are given fatherly and motherly talks at least three times a week during cafeteria time, assemblies and at Sunday services. The principal and president play a key role in this. These talks encourage values development, school pride, etc.

13. Staff and administration are required to interact with students on a daily basis to encourage the feeling of belonging to a caring family structure (e.g., family-like picnics are held, some staff eat with students, students are hugged, some staff sponsor students in various projects, and students are disciplined in a parent-like manner).

14. All grades are assigned class sponsors who are required to meet daily with their respective classes. The sponsors oversee student grades, provide discipline and counseling, plan student trips and other fun activities, provide positive reinforcement, etc. Sponsors attempt to keep track of every student and his/her needs.

15. An adopt-a-student program and big brother program were established to provide one-on-one assistance to students with the most need.

16. Consistent with the African proverb "it takes a village to raise a child," a Rites of Passage program has been implemented to provide students with the life skills denoted in the seven principles of Kwanza.

17. Two weekly forums are conducted, one for males and one for females. The forums were started by male teachers on campus exclusively for male students to address the national black male crisis. The response was so positive, the project was expanded to bring in male and female community role models to speak to male and female students respectively.

Physical Environment

1. A grounds manager was hired to improve and maintain the aesthetic appearance of the campus grounds. Students are required to help maintain the grounds for the purpose of instilling pride and responsibility for the appearance of their school.

2. Graffiti is removed from all campus buildings and walls in a timely manner. Students must participate in this removal to help discourage them from putting it up.

3. Every effort is made to keep buildings and classrooms neat, clean and painted. Findings show that the appearance of the physical environment is related to attitudes and behaviors of both students and staff.

4. Wherever possible, students are involved in the maintenance and upkeep of the physical plant.

Administration

1. Administrative goals and objectives are articulated to staff on a regular basis.

2. Staff are evaluated annually and provided with feedback.

3. Staff committees have been established for the purpose of having input on administrative decisions.

4. An open-door policy is maintained by top level administrators for the purpose of maintaining open channels of communication.

5. A long-range plan has been executed for the purpose of providing direction to the staff to help them focus on goals and objectives.

6. The administration holds high expectations for its faculty, staff, and students.

Resource Development

1. A development office was established for the purpose of increasing financial resources.

2. Volunteers are used throughout the school program.

3. Staff are encouraged to donate financially to the school.

4. An alumni affairs office was established for the purpose of increasing financial and volunteer support.

TABLE I

FALL COMPARISONS OF CAT SCORES FOR 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990 AND 1991

GRADE	1986 N	1986 G.E.	1986 M.N.P.	1987 N	1987 G.E.	1987 M.N.P.	1988 N	1988 G.E.	1988 M.N.P.	1989 N	1989 G.E.	1989 M.N.P.	1990 N	1990 G.E.	1990 M.N.P.	1991 N	1991 G.E.	1991 M.N.P.
3	6	2.8	(34.3)	8	2.9	(36.5)	7	3.1	(17.0)	7	2.3	(38.0)	7	2.5	(25.9)	5	1.9	***
4	4	4.3	(56.3)	6	3.0	(21.5)	10	2.9	(22.7)	7	3.1	(25.5)	7	4.2	(44.0)	6	3.0	***
5	8	5.8	(54.0)	4	4.3	(41.0)	15	4.4	(27.0)	11	4.0	(24.5)	7	4.4	(32.2)	3	4.1	***
6	11	5.8	(52.0)	10	5.4	(36.7)	16	4.9	(27.5)	12	4.9	(32.0)	11	5.0	(35.0)	8	4.9	(33.6)
7	30	5.4	(24.0)	33	4.8	(17.3)	30	6.9	(24.7)	26	6.6	(33.0)	12	6.1	(35.7)	24	5.9	(29.5)
8	32	5.9	(16.8)	40	6.5	(30.4)	57	7.5	(38.0)	34	7.7	(35.0)	26	7.6	(39.0)	34	6.8	(30.5)
9	51	7.4	(22.0)	63	7.5	(23.0)	63	8.8	(29.0)	60	7.8	(37.0)	34	8.5	(38.0)	45	9.6	(55.0)
10	55	8.1	(31.6)	41	8.6	(34.0)	63	9.3	(35.0)	56	8.9	(44.5)	60	9.8	(45.5)	64	9.4	(40.5)
11	53	8.2	(25.7)	72	9.8	(47.3)	53	10.5	(42.7)	60	9.4	(41.5)	56	10.5	(42.6)	67	10.7	(46.5)
12	39	9.1	(27.7)	57	9.3	(29.4)	58	10.3	(30.3)	41	9.6	(39.0)	60	11.0	(43.0)	50	11.9	(48.3)

Note: N represents the number of persons taking the test.
G.E. represents grade equivalent.
M.N.P. represents median national percentile.

TABLE II

SPRING COMPARISONS OF CAT SCORES FOR 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990 AND 1991

GRADE	N	1986 G.E.	1986 M.N.P.	N	1987 G.E.	1987 M.N.P.	N	1988 G.E.	1988 M.N.P.	N	1989 G.E.	1989 M.N.P.	N	1990 G.E.	1990 M.N.P.	N	1991 G.E.	1991 M.N.P.
3	3	5.4	(71.0)	6	3.4	(42.0)	7	3.1	(33.0)	8	5.6	(79.5)	7	3.6	(38.0)	7	4.5	(68.0)
4	4	5.5	(62.0)	3	3.7	(30.0)	9	4.5	(45.5)	13	4.4	(38.0)	7	3.5	(33.0)	6	5.4	(57.5)
5	4	5.7	(63.0)	6	6.0	(44.0)	5	7.7	(72.0)	15	6.6	(79.4)	11	6.4	(54.0)	6	5.5	(40.0)
6	3	7.6	(59.0)	12	6.2	(45.0)	9	7.0	(62.0)	16	5.4	(27.5)	10	7.4	(56.0)	11	5.5	(33.0)
7	14	5.1	(17.0)	29	6.3	(29.0)	27	6.5	(31.3)	23	5.4	(17.0)	24	7.0	(28.7)	27	6.7	(38.0)
8	32	7.6	(28.0)	23	7.3	(28.0)	29	7.9	(36.0)	47	9.0	(49.0)	27	8.3	(38.3)	30	8.5	(49.5)
9	42	8.7	(35.0)	42	8.5	(30.5)	43	9.8	(49.5)	56	8.6	(36.0)	53	9.4	(39.0)	49	8.9	(39.3)
10	42	7.9	(19.8)	46	8.7	(29.5)	42	11.8	(49.5)	52	10.4	(44.3)	50	10.4	(42.3)	67	10.1	(42.0)
11	39	9.1	(29.5)	52	10.0	(37.8)	61	12.9	(59.0)	42	10.3	(47.8)	60	12.9	(48.3)	64	12.9	(52.0)
12	30	8.4	(29.0)	31	9.2	(30.0)	53	11.7	(53.2)	58	10.4	(41.0)	40	12.4	(52.0)	50	12.9	(50.0)

Note: N represents the number of persons taking the test.
G.E. represents grade equivalent.
M.N.P. represents median national percentile.

TABLE III

A SEVEN-YEAR COMPARISON OF ACT SCORES

YEAR	NATIONAL COMP.	MISSISSIPPI COMP.	PWS COMP.*	STATE AND PWS DIFFERENCE	NATIONAL AND PWS DIFFERENCE
1984-85	18.6	15.5	9.8	5.7	8.8
1985-86	18.7	16.3	13.0	3.3	5.7
1986-87	20.8	18.8	12.6	6.2	8.2
1987-88	20.8	18.1	12.4	5.7	8.4
1988-89	18.6	15.9	11.8	4.1	6.8
1989-90	20.6	18.5	16.1	2.4	4.5
1990-91	20.6	18.6	17.3	1.3	3.3

NUMBER OF PINEY WOODS STUDENTS SCORING 15 AND ABOVE*:

1984-85	1
1985-86	8
1986-87	10
1987-88	25
1988-89	28
1990-91	101
1991-92	84**

*All Piney Woods seniors, regardless of college-going intentions are required to take the ACT. Mississippi and national composites reflect only college-going seniors.

**Scores until February 1992.

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Appendix A

Questions Comprising the Academic Futility Scale

a. How many students in this school don't care if they get bad grades?

b. How many students in this school make fun or tease students who get real good grades?

c. How many students don't do as well as they could do in school because they are afraid other students won't like them as much?

d. How many students don't do as well as they could do in school because they are afraid their friends won't like them as much?

e. People like me will not have much of a chance to do what we want to in life.

f. People like me will never do well in school even though we try hard.

g. I can do well in school if I work hard.

h. In this school, students like me don't have any luck.

i. You have to be lucky to get good grades in this school.

j. How many teachers in this school tell students to try and get better grades than their classmates?

k. Of the teachers that you know in this school, how many don't care if the students get bad grades?

l. Of the teachers that you know in this school, how many don't care how hard the student works as long as he passes?

Appendix B

A Very Imporant Peson

Take a look at me
And hear with I say.
I was put together
In a perfect way.

What I'm sayin'
Ain't no bunk.
God didn't take time
To make no junk.

He gave me a good brain
And there's no excuse.
Not to take this brain
And put it to use.

He gave me this body
To treat real good.
And I'll treat this body
Like everybody should.

And you'd best better believe
When you're lookin' at me,
You've got your eyes set
On a V.I.P.!

Appendix C

Research Findings That Relate Teacher Attitude and Behavior to Achievement and Futility Exhibited by Students

School Climate: Schools can make a difference in the academic behaviors that students exhibit. In higher achieving schools (controlling for race and SES) for instance, teachers tended to translate their belief that their students could achieve, into real, tangible behaviors.

Principal's Role: In the higher achieving schools, the principal appeared to play the primary or lead role in establishing and maintaining an academic climate that was conducive to higher achievement.

Teacher Commitment: Teachers in the higher achieving schools verbalized their commitment. They also demonstrated through innovativeness in the classroom, teacher-teacher interaction, teacher-student interaction, pushing their students to achieve, and so forth.

Time Spent on Instruction: After only a few days of observation, it became apparent that in the higher achieving schools, teachers spent more time teaching and the kind of instruction was more conducive to higher achievement.

Write-offs: Observations suggested that teachers in higher achieving schools were less willing to accept the notion that large numbers of their students were destined to be academic failures because of race and/or socioeconomic status.

Teaching Games: Group-oriented instructional games were observed in use more often in the higher achieving schools. In the lower achieving schools individually-oriented games were used often in remedial classes.

Expectations: Teachers in the higher achieving schools appeared to hold higher academic expectations for more of their students, and were less likely to blame low achievement on the socioeconomic background of the student.

Grouping: Grouping in the higher achieving schools appeared to be more flexible. Mechanisms for allowing students to progress from lower to higher achieving groups appeared to be more objective.

Reinforcement Practices: Confusing or ambiguous reinforcement was only rarely observed in the higher achieving schools; that is, teachers rewarded improvement but were quick to point out where and how further improvement was needed.

Alternative Grading Structures: Black students tend to show more gains in achievement in mathematics when they are rewarded on the basis of improvement as opposed to being rewarded on the basis of relative standing.

Focused Instruction: Teachers who prepare and present material to be learned in a clear and orderly fashion and provide continuous and timely feedback tend to elicit higher levels of achievement from their students.